

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-06

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P 021710Z MAR 76

FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 471

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 3 SAN SALVADOR 1091

LIMDIS

DEPT PASS ALL CA DIPLOMATIC POSTS, USCINCSO FOR POLAD

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TAGS: PINT PGOV ES

SUBJ: STAYING IN POWER - SALVADORAN STYLE

REF: A. SAN SALVADOR 868; (B) SAN SALVADOR 323,
(C) SAN SALVADOR A-108 OF AUGUST 5, 1975

BEGIN CONFIDENTIAL

1. SUMMARY - THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE MARCH 14 ELECTIONS OF DEPUTIES AND MUNICIAPAL OFFICERS, FIVE WEEKS OLD, WAS NOT ATTRACTING MUCH ATTENTION. THE APATHY SEEMED TO BE WORKING IN THE GOVERNMENT'S FAVOR. THIS DULL BUT PEACFUL MOOD WAS BROKEN WHEN THE CENTRAL ELECTION COUNCIL UNEXPECTEDLY DISQUALIFIED THE OPPOSITION UNO SLATE FOR DEPUTY SEATS FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF SAN SALVADOR, TECHNICAL VIOLATIONS OF ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS WERE CITED. THE SINGLE CHARGE THAT WAS SUSTAINED BY "EVIDENCE" HAS A RATHER STRONG "DIRTY TRICK" SMELL. WHETHER IT WAS A TRICK OR NOT, THE ARBITRARINESS OF THE ACT MIGHT HAVE UNPLANNED-FOR CONSEQUENCES FOR ITS PERPETRATORS. THE DISQUALIFICATION, PLUS RELATED EFFORTS TO HARASS THE OPPOSITION BY TAMPERING WITH THE UNO'S BASE OF POWER IN MUNICIAPL GOVERNMENT, PUSHED THE THREE COMPONENTS OF THE OPPOSITION COALITION INTO ANNOUNCING THEIR WITHDRAWAL FROM THE ELECTION. THE GOVERNMENT WAS TAKEN BY SURPRISE. IT IS JUST

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NOW BEGINNING TO REALIZE THE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF HAVING POSSIBLY

MARTYRED THE ONCE TAME OPPOSITION. THE RESULTANT TENSION HAS CAUSED A RESUMPTION OF SPECULATION AS TO THE FUTURE OF THE PCN AND THE MOLINA ADMINISTRATION. WE BELIVE THE GOVERNMENT CAN EASILY WEATHER THE IMMEDIATE CRISIS, BUT ARE NOT SO SURE OF THE LONGER TERM IMPLICATIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. THE SETTING: MANY OBSERVERS PREDICTED THAT THE MARCH 1976 MUNICIPAL/LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS WOULD BE A SIGNIFICANT EVENT IN SALVADOR'S INTERNAL POLITICAL AFFAIRS - PARTICULARLY AS A HARBINGER OF THE FOLLOWING YEAR'S PRESIDENTIAL SELECTION. THE FORECAST HAD BEEN FOR A TUMULTUOUS CAMPAIGN IN WHICH "ANYTHING MIGH HAPPEN". THIS PROGNOSTICATION WAS NOT BORNE OUT THROUGH MID-FEBRUARY. WHAT THERE WAS OF A CAMAIGN WAS LISTLESS AND ATTRACTED MEAGER ATTENTION. ONE OF THE PROBLEMS WAS THAT NEITHER THE GOVERNMENT PCN NOR THE UNO COALITION OPPOSITION ADDRESSED THE GUT ISSUES. THE PCN CAMPAIGN WAS AMEDIA BLITA - ANNOUNCEMENTS, FILM KLIPS AND JINGLES-LABELING THE UNO OPPOSITION "COMMUNIST", WITHA THAT WORD SYNONOMOUS WITH "SUBVERSION AND TERRORISM". CONCLUSION: A VOTE FOR UNO IS A VOTE FOR ANARCHY AND TERROR. THE UNO OPPOSITION MESSAGE, CONVEYED MOSTLY THROUGH NEWS-PAPER ADVERTISEMENTS, LEAFLETS AND OCCASIONAL RALLIES, WAS A SIMPLE DENUNCIATION OF THE MOLINA ADMINISTRATION AS "FASCIST" AND "NON-DEMOCRATIC". A SECOND PROBLEM THE CAMPAIGN SUFFERED FROM WASR THAT ITS RESULTS WERE SEEN AS A FOREGONE CONCLUSION, I.;3., A PCN VICTORY OF SUFFICIENT MAGNITUDE TO MAINTAIN THE REGIME'S DOMINANT POSITION.

3. THE SPARK: THE CAMPAIGN SUDDENLY AND DRAMATICALLY CAME TO LIFE ON FEBRUARY 17. ON THAT DAY THE CENTRAL ELECTION COUNCIL (CCE) REFUSED TO INSCRIBE UNO'S CANDIDATES FOR THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF SAN SALVADOR (SAN SALVADOR 868). THE RULING OF INVALIDATION WAS FINAL. (A TOKEN LAST APPEAL WAS TURNED DOWN ON FEBRUARY 25.) IN ONE STROKE THE CCE HAD REMOVED A LARGE CHUNK OF THE UNO LEADERSHIP FROM THE ELECTORAL RACE AND DENIED UNO ITS PRINCIPAL FORUM FOR ATTACKS ON THE GOVERNMENT. GIVEN THE BLATANCY OF THE CCE'S ACT AND THE DEVASTATING EFFECT IT HAD ON THE OPPOSITION'S LEADERSHIP, IT IS NOTSURPRISING THAT THE UNO'S THREE COMPONENT PARTIES EACH DECIDED TO WITHDRAW IN PROTEST FROM THE ELECTION. THE PDC LED THE WALKOUT, WITH THE MNR AN UDN SOMEWHAT RELUCTANTLY FORCED TO GO SECRET

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ALONG. THE UNO MET AS A COALITION ON FEBRUARY 24 AND RATIFIED THE DECISION. IT IS STILL UNCLEAR WHAT WILL APPEAR ON THE BALLOTS COME ELECTION DAY. THE UNO WITHDRAWAL MIGHT BE IGNORED BY THE CCE. ANOTHER POSSIBLE RESULT WILL BE THAT THE GOVERNMENT PARTY WILL FIND ITSELF WINNING 54 OF 54 ASSEMBLY SEATS, AND 261 OF 261 MINICIPIOS.

4. WHY THE WITHDRAWAL: THE PCN HAS REACTED HEATEDLY AND SOMEWHAT

DEFENSIVELY TO THE UNO WITHDRAWAL. IT APPEARED TO HAVE BEEN TAKEN BY SURPRISE. PARY EXECUTIVE SECRETARY (AND ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT) RUBEN ALFONSO "CHELE" RODRIGUEZ CLAIMED THAT THE COALITION QUIT BECAUSE: (1) IT WAS UNABLE TO FIND QUALIFIED CANDIDATES (UNO HAD FILED SLATES IN ONLY 89 OF THE 261 MUNICIPIOS); (2) IT THUS HAD TO RESORT TO THE SORT OF "INELIGIBLE" CANDIDATES THAT GOT IT IN TROUBLE IN SAN SALVADOR; (3) IT CAME TO THE REALIZATION THAT IT WAS TOTALLY LACKING IN POPULAR SUPPORT, AND (4) ITS LEADERSHIP WAS SO INCOMPETENT THAT IT COULD NOT EVEN INSCRIBE ITSELF PROPERLY.

5. THE UNO STATED ITS CASE IN SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT TERMS. THE COALITION CLAIMED THE CCE ACT WAS ONLY THE LATEST IN A SERIES OF GOVERNMENT TACTICS TO EMASCULATE ITS. IT CITED THE CCE'S (AND ITS SUBSIDIARY ORGANS') REFUSAL TO INSCRIBE UNO MUNICIPAL SLATES ON THE BASIS OF TECHNICALITIES. ANOTHER COMPLAINT OF MORE SERIOUS PRAGMATIC CONSEQUENCES WAS RECENT GOES EFFORTS TO DISCREDIT THOSE MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS IN UNO CONTROL. THE PDC ADMINISTRATION OF SAN SALVADOR HAS BEEN UNDER ALMOST CONSTANT ATTACK FOR THE PAST SIX MONTHS. THE GOVERNMENT RECENTLY SNET A BILL TO THE ASSEMBLY WHICH GIVES IT ALMOST COMPLETE CONTROL OVER A MUNICIPIO'S BUDGET, AND THUS DEPRIVES IT OF ANY SEMBLANCE OF AUTONOMY. THE UNO'S POWER BASE, ITS ONLY SOURCE OF PATRONAGE, IS IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE LARGE URBAN CENTERS SUCH AS SAN SALVADOR. AN UNO LEAFLET CLAIMED IT WAS THIS ATTACK ON MUNICIPAL AUTONOMY THAT WAS THE PRINCIPAL CAUSE OF THE WITHDRAWAL.

NOTE BY OCT: NOT PASSED.

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P 021710Z MAR 76

FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 472

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 3 SAN SALVADOR 1091

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6. THE DIRTY TRICK: WHY THE GOES, THROUGH ITS MANIPULATION OF THE CCE FUNCTION, CHOSE TO ACT AS IT DID LAST WEEK IS UNCLEAR. HOW IT DID SO IS SOMEWHAT MORE EVIDENT, ALTHOUGH CERTAIN PARTS OF THE STORY REMAIN BASED ON CIRCUMSTANTIAL RATHER THAN HARD EVIDENCE. CONSIDER THE CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS:

A) JANUARY 19. THE UNO CONVENTION SELECTS ITS CANDIDATES FOR ALL DEPARTMENTS;

(B) JANUARY 22 - LUIS ANTONIO LOPEZ GARCIA, ONE OF THE PDC POTENTIAL CANDIDATES, SIGNS A CONTRACT WITH A MUNICIPALITY TO BUILD A SOCCER FIELD (THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS APPEARS LATER);

(C) JANUARY 26 - THE UNO OFFICIALLY PRESENTS THE NAMES OF ITS SAN SALVADOR CANDIDATES TO THE CCE FOR INSCRIPTION;

(D) FEBRUARY 4 - THE PCN CHALLENGES THE UNO SLATE FOR SAN SALVADOR. THE PCN CHARGES THAT ONE PRINCIPAL CANDIDATE, JULIO ADOLFO REY PRENDES, IS DELINQUENT IN PAYING HIS MUNICIPAL TAXES, AND ONE ALTERNATE CANDIDATE, LUIS ANTONIO LOPEZ GARCIA, IS IN A CONTRACTUAL RELATIONSHIP WITH A GOVERNMENT ENTITY, A SELDOM-INVOKED PROVISION OF THE CONSTITUTION WHICH MAKES HIM INELIGIBLE.

(E) FEBRUARY 7 - LOPEZ GARCIA IS THOUGHT TO BE KIDNAPPED FROM HIS HOME;

(F) FEBRUARY 9 - UNO TAKES OUT NEWSPAPER ADS ASKING FOR INFORMATION AS TO THE WHEREABOUTS OF LOPEZ GARCIA. IT QUESTIONS THE PCN CHARGES AGAINST HIM BY SAYING IT IS DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE THAT A MAN WHO HAS NEVER WORKED AS A CONTRACTOR, NEVER BEEN ASSOCIATED
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WITH THE CONSTRUCTION BUSINESS, NEVER EARNED MORE THAN \$100 PER MONTH AS A MUNICIPAL OFFICER WORKER, WOULD HAVE SIGNED A CONTRACT WITH A PCN CONTROLLED MUNICIPIO TO BUILD A \$18,000 SPORTS PARK.

(G) FEBRUARY 12 - THE CCE DENIES THE UNO INSCRIPTION AND GIVES IT 48 HOURS TO APPEAL.

(H) FEBRUARY 13 - FULL PAGE ADS APPEAR IN ALL LOCAL PAPERS CARRYING AN OPEN LETTER, SUPPOSEDLY SIGNED BY LOPEZ GARCIA, IN WHICH HE CLAIMS: 1) HE IS ALIVE AND WELL; 2) HE SIGNED THE MUNICIPAL CONTRACT; 3) HE DENOUNCES THE UNO AND PDC FOR PRINTING REDICULOUS THINGS ABOUT HIS "DISAPPEARANCE" AND FOR DENYING THAT THEY WERE AWARE OF HIS INELIGIBILITY. IN A WORD, HE FULLY JUSTIFIED THE CCE RULING.

(I) FEBRUARY 13 - UNO SUBMITS A SECOND CANDIDATE LIST RETAINING REY PRENDES (AND SUBMITTING PROOF THAT THE MUNICIPAL TAX PROBLEM HAS BEEN RESOLVED) BUT SUBSTITUTING ANOTHER NAME FOR THAT LOPEZ GARCIA.

(J) FEBRUARY 17 - THE FOREIGN OFFICE APPROACHES THE EMBASSY "IN

STRICTEST CONFIDENCE", ASKING HOW LOPEZ GARCIA COULD BE ISSUED A VISA, CLAIMING THAT HE HAD SOUGHT GOVERNMENT PROTECTION FEARING HIS LIVE WAS IN DANGER.

(K) FEBRUARY 17 - THE CCE ISSUES ITS FINAL DECISION. THE UNO SLATE IS DISQUALIFIED. THE REASON, THE ENTIRE FIRST LIST HAD BEEN DISQUALIFIED BY THE PRESENCE OF LOPEZ GARCIA. SUBMISSION OF AN ENTIRELY NEW LIST IS CALLED FOR, NOT THE SIMPLE SUBSTITUTION OF ONE NAME. THE DEADLINE FOR INSCRIPTION HAS PASSED.

(L) FEBRUARY 17 - UNO SUBMITS A PROTEST ASKING FOR A CCE REVIEW OF ITS DECISION. END CONFIDENTIAL

BEGIN SECRET

(M) FEBRUARY 19 - THE FOREIGN OFFICE SENDS AN OFFICIAL NOTE REQUESTING A DIPLOMATIC VISA FOR LOPEZ GARCIA, SAYING HE WILL BE EMPLOYED AT THE SALVADORAN CONSULATE GENERAL IN SAN FRANCISCO IN AN OFFICIAL CAPACITY. AN A2 VISA IS ISSUED.

7. THE TIMING OF THE SAGA OF LOPEZ GARCIA CERTAINLY RAISES QUESTIONS ABOUT THE CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING HIS INELIGIBILITY. A SIMPLE EMPLOYEE OF THE PDC CONTROLLED SAN SALVADOR MAYOR'S OFFICE IS REWARDED FOR HIS LONG PARTY WORK BY BEING NAMED AS THE 21ST ON A LIST OF 22 UNO CANDIDATES. THREE DAYS LATER HE SIGNS A CONTRACT TO BUILD A SPORTS FIELD FOR A PCN TOWN, AN ACTIVITY
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FOREIGN TO HIS EXPERIENCE, WHICH ALREADY HAS A RECENTLY BUILT FIELD. WITHIN EIGHT DAYS OF HIS NAME BEING PRESENTED FOR INSCRIPTION, THE GOVERNMENT PARTY USES THE FACT OF THE CONTRACT TO CHALLENGE THE ENTIRE SLATE. LOPEZ GARCIA DISAPPEARS, AND RESURFACES IN FULL PAGE ADS WHICH IN EACH NEWSPAPER COST AT LEAST \$300, WHERE HE DENOUNCES HIS PARTY. A FEW DAYS LATER THE GOVERNMENT FACILITATES HIS REMOVAL FROM THE COUNTRY UNDER COVER OF A QUICKLY CREATED POSITION IN ITS CONSULAR SERVICE. CONCLUSION - COLLUSION. END SECRET

BEGIN CONFIDENTIAL

8. COMMENT: WHOEVER ORIGINATED THE IDEA OF DISQUALIFYING THE UNO OPPOSITION IN THIS FASHION COULD BE SUFFERING THE PAINS OF ONE WHO HAS OUTSMARTED HIMSELF. FIRST, A WORD IN HIS FAVOR, IT MUST HAVE BEEN OVERWHELMINGLY TEMPTING TO SLICE OFF, WITH ONE CLEAN CUT, THE HEAD OF THE OPPOSITION, AND DO SO WITHIN THE LETTER OF THE LAW. IT ALSO MIGHT HAVE BEEN TEMPTING TO PREDICT THAT THE UNO WOULD ACCEPT THE DECAPITATION MEETLY, AS IT REPEATEDLY HAS ACCEPTED HARASSMENT OF THIS TYPE IN THE PAST. THE TACTIC THEN APPEARED, AT FIRST GLANCE, THE PERFECT OPPORTUNITY TO HOLD THE ELECTION, PERMIT A CERTAIN NUMBER OF THE PROVINCIAL OPPOSITION TO TAKE OFFICE, BUT ELIMINATE THOSE OF THE UNO WHO HAVE USED THEIR ASSEMBLY SEATS TO EMBARRASS AND FRUSTRATE THE GOVERNMENT.

9. THE HITCH WAS THAT: A) UNO CHOSE TO WITHDRAW RATHER THAN COOPERATE (A SPOKESMAN SUMMARIZED UNO'S RATIONALE BY QUOTING ALEX SALAVERRIA, THE LONE DEPUTY FROM THE ARCH-CONSERVATIVE FUDI, WHEN HE ANNOUNCED WHY HIS PARTY WOULD NOT PARTICIPATE IN THIS YEAR'S ELECTIONS - "WE WILL NOT PARTICIPATE IN A POKER GAME IN WHICH THE PCN SETS THE RULES, DEALS THE CARDS, AND NEVERTHELESS FEELS IT HAS TO CHEAT".); AND B) THE PLANNER HAD NOT ANALYSED THE POSSIBLE EVENTS THAT COULD BE SET IN MOTION BY SUCH A TRANSPARENT ACT.

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P 021710Z MAR 76

FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 473

S E C R E T SECTION 3 OF 3 SAN SALVADOR 1091

LIMDIS

10. THE IRONY IS THAT THE PREVIOUS DULL CAMPAIGN WAS JUST WHAT THE REGIME NEEDED. AN APATHY HAD SET IN THAT WAS LL TO THE PCN'S ADVANTAGE. THE OPPOSITION'S RHETORIC WAS NOT CATCHING ON. THE VOTES COULD BE QUIETLY COUNTED AND RESULTS ANNOUNCED, AS IN THE 1974 ELECTION. PAST EXPERIENCE WOULD INDICATE THAT THIS WOULD HAVE BEEN ACCEPTABLE TO ALMOST EVERYONE. NOW THE REGIME FACES THE DISQUIETING POSSIBILITY THAT THE UNO WILL WITHDRAW NOISILY, CALL ON ITS ADHERENTS AND THOSE WHO SYMPATHIZE WITH ITS PLIGHT TO BOYCOTT THE MARCH 14 "CHARADE", AND RESORT TO OUTHER, LESS ORDERLY METHODS OF CHALLENGING THE GOVERNMENT. A TAME OPPOSITION IN THE ASSEMBLY IS ONE THING. A MARTYRED, FRUSTRATED AND DEFIANT ONE IN THE STREETS WOULD BE SOMETHING QUITE DIFFERENT, ESPECIALLY TO THOSE IN THE OFFICER CORPS AND BUSINESS SECTOR WHO BELIEVE PUBLIC ORDER IS OF THE HIGHEST PRIORITY.

11. THERE IS CONSIDERABLE EVIDENCE THAT THIS THOUGHT IS BEGINNING

TO SINK IN. THE LEADERSHIP OF THE ARMED FORCE REPORTEDLY HAS HELD INNUMERABLE SPECIAL MEETINGS SINCE LAST WEEK, AND THE TOPIC HAS BEEN THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL SITUATION. THE AIRWAVES ARE INUNDATED WITH PCN SPOKESMEN DISMISSING THE UNO'S WITHDRAWAL AS A DESPERATE ATTEMPT BY ITS LEADERSHIP TO OVERTURN THE NORMAL ELECTORAL PROCESS SINCE IT CANNOT WIN. DATT HAS PICKED UP AN ACCOUNT OF DISCUSSIONS OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY BETWEEN PDC REPRESENTATIVES AND MILITARY OFFICER EXILES. TALK IS GOING AROUND THAT THE LUMSINESS OF THIS MOVE, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF
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GREATER RATHER THAN LESSER POLITICAL TURMOIL IN THE MONTHS AHEAD, MIGHT PREJUDICE THE MOLINA ADMINISTRATION.

12. NONE OF THIS IS TO SUGGEST THAT THE INGREDIENTS OF SUCH DRAMATIC CHANGES ARE WITH US AT THIS TIME. THE "CRISIS" IS OF MANAGEABLE PROPORTIONS IN ITS PRESENT STATE. AS IN EARLY "CRISES" THAT MOLINA HAS FACED (SAN SALVADOR 0193 OF JANUARY 1975) THERE IS NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THE IMPORTANT MILITARY COMMANDERS ARE READY TO LEND THEMSELVES OR THEIR TROOPS TO MOLINA'S REMOVAL. WE THEREFORE BELIEVE THAT THE PRESENT STORM WILL PASS. THE DANGER FOR THE GOVERNMENT IS THAT THE LONGER TERM WEATHER PICTURE IS CLOUDY AT BEST, AND PERHAPS THE ENTIRE ATMOSPHERE HAS BEEN IRREDEEMABLY ALTERED BY THESE EVENTS. IF THE OPPOSITION DOES IMPLMENT A PLA TO HECKLE AND EMBARRASS THE REGIME IN THE STREETS, WE COULD CONCEIVE OF THE SITUATION DETERIORATING TO A POINT WHERE ELEMENTS IN THE MILITARY OFFICER COPRS FEEL COMPELLED TO REMOVE MOLINA AS A "COSMETIC CHANGE" NECESSARY TO GET THINGS BACK TO NORMAL.
END CONFIDENTIAL.

CAMPBELL

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